



Chambers's Journal

SIXTH SERIES.

A MYSTERY OF THE SWORD.

BY E. AND H. HERON.

IN TWO PARTS.—PART I.



THE Englishman who remains for any time abroad generally takes fencing-lessons, and, as the *maitre-d'armes* will tell you, fences in his own manner. The *maitre* will say this with studied courtesy; but if you press him further he will spread out his hands with a gesture full of significance. 'Ah, these gentlemen, they are strong, they are audacious; but for science—pouf!' and again he will take refuge in that comprehensive shrug.

Fencing happened to be a favourite amusement of mine from my boyhood; so that when I followed the example of my countrymen I flattered myself that my knowledge of the art won me a special place in the good graces of M. Desterre, at that time perhaps the first, though not the most fashionable, fencing-master in Paris.

Some years later, while idling through an enforced holiday in Normandy and Brittany, I came across my old friend at Pontorson. I recognised the slight, alert figure at once, and hailed him with delight. He dined with me, and afterwards, as we rose from table, he said to me: 'It is my custom, monsieur, to take a half-bottle of wine at a small inn on the outskirts of the town; I shall feel honoured if monsieur will do me the pleasure of joining me.'

So we walked through the darkening street, where the lamps still hung unlit on their ropes because the moon would rise presently. We found the inn, standing square to the road, its windows mere black apertures in the flat whitewashed walls, for the long gray slatted shutters were all agape to let in the warm summer air, and the customary bunch of mistletoe hung over the door.

Desterre introduced me to the stout and comely hostess, who led us through a gate by the house-wall into a portion of the garden set with small round tables, where a modified seclusion awaited the wealthier customers of Madame Bolande, while the low wooden paling separating it from the road

offered no hindrance to conversation being carried on with the more numerous groups outside.

I noticed that one of these tables was regarded as Desterre's special property; it was empty, and Desterre walked to it, bowed ceremoniously to the occupants of the other tables, and sat down in an absent, methodical manner which suggested habit.

Declining a 'café-cognac,' I joined my friend in his half-bottle.

'It is good,' he remarked, smiling, and balancing his glass between thumb and forefinger. 'From the South. It is of a vintage that never reaches England.' This I had every reason to believe.

So the evening passed in conversation with our neighbours, who presently said good-night and withdrew; but we ordered more wine, and lingered till the moonbeams shone on the brightly-polished table between us that held our wine and cigarettes, and Desterre began to talk of things that had been. This was the real Desterre, quite unlike the bristle of a man I remembered at the fencing-school at Paris. No one could have looked less like that personage with a terrible reputation than M. Desterre of Pontorson. He had a slight, round-chested figure, thin gray hair, thick white moustache, clean-shaven, narrow cheeks, and an expression of pathetic humour.

As for Pontorson, it delighted in his reputation. He was the pride of the town, I learnt afterwards—this retired fencing-master, who walked with a pre-occupied air of dignity to mass on Sundays, and otherwise spent most of his leisure in cultivating roses and lettuces with conspicuous success. Only once had the people of his native town seen their 'grand Desterre' with a foil in his hand; and that was on the occasion of a crack regiment passing through Pontorson, which regiment contained, it was said, the best fencer in the French army. The men treated Desterre with respect and admiration, and the officers invited him for the evening. During the afternoon he was persuaded to cross swords with

his young rival. It was at the Café Vouffel, and Desterre produced the weapons with which he had defeated Verlini in that famous trial of skill of which you will hear to this day in the fencing-schools of Paris; and after seeing that the buttons were fast, he offered the choice of blades to his opponent. There was the ring of meeting steel, a pass, and the officer's sword in the bed of marigolds under the window!

'Yes, monsieur,' he began, 'there is a gap since I left this place forty years ago. In the interval I never returned. I left this Pontorson a young man with dreams, I return old—with memories.'

Unadvisedly I spoke. 'Memories? You must have many of interest.'

He pulled himself together, threw away his half-smoked cigarette with a movement of impatience, and busied himself in lighting another before he replied in a different tone:

'But—yes. I have been engaged in many peculiar affairs. There was the affair of M. le Capitaine anglais.'

I saw that I lost some narration more intimate, more privileged; but I accepted with pleasure the story he proposed to give me.

'Was he as awkward a pupil as the rest of us?' I asked, laughing.

'Ah, monsieur, you are one of the lucky few, who begin in early youth, as we do in France; but you cannot teach a man grown to be supple, easy, rapid. The joints and muscles have passed the moment of possible training. They are set. After that—what will you? It is useless.'

'Who was this English captain?' I asked.

'His name was Brerliam—John Brerliam of—I forget what branch of the service. I first saw him on a gloomy day in Paris. I had undertaken a little expedition to the Bois to make my first bow to the approaching summer. On re-entering I was informed that a gentleman was awaiting my return.

'Without it was rapidly darkening, and the fallow sky frowned in through the long windows of the *salle-d'armes*, which for the moment was empty, though a little later it would be full of my pupils and others, as you remember it. Leaning against one of the pillars at the lower end I perceived my new client, towards whom I advanced with a bow.

'At your service, monsieur.'

'That's all right,' he replied, 'for the fact is I am about to fight a duel.'

'He was a red-faced, black-haired young man, with a ruffled air and a manner at once hurried, puzzled, and commanding. One liked him at first sight—this big handsome fellow.

'I understand,' I said. 'Monsieur wishes a *leçon de duel* to perfect himself; is it not so?'

'Exactly. And the fight comes off the third day from now,' he replied. After some further talk we arranged an hour for the morrow, and M. le Capitaine flung into the street in his impetuous manner.

'On his leaving me I tried to recall the details of any quarrels which had reached my ears of late; but in vain; I could recall nothing to fit the case. This Captain Brerliam was plainly an Englishman, about seven-and-twenty years of age, hot-blooded and determined.

'While I was so engaged, my client reappeared.

'Are we alone?' he inquired, glancing round.

'Quite alone, monsieur.'

'I have been told that you are remarkable in Paris for two things,' he said abruptly, 'sword-play and silence.'

'Both or either are at your service as you desire, monsieur,' I answered.

'The fact is, I am out of my depth in this affair altogether.'

'May I ask the name of your opponent?'

'Von Stulbach—Heinrich von Stulbach, a gentleman of Bavaria—or so he says.'

'But monsieur suspects—?' I asked, as he paused.

'I'm not here to suspect, but to fight,' he answered irritably. 'I only wish to know something more about this Bavarian. I met him by chance to-day in a café on the Boulevards. The odd part of it is that he is the third German who has called me out within the last fortnight. I have been some months—during the winter, in fact—in Berlin. The first challenge is beside the question, and need not be considered now. On both the other occasions the quarrel was none of my seeking—forced upon me, in fact, by strangers. The insults of Von Stulbach, for instance, were entirely gratuitous.'

'And your second duel—how did that end?'

'He laughed out suddenly and loudly.

'It never came off! The other fellow bolted at the last moment. Good-night. Find out something if you can. I am told that in Paris one can learn anything—for a consideration.'

'And again he was gone. He reminded me of a clap of thunder. He absorbed one's attention while he was there, and when he went one dwelt on his words. The personality of the man was engrossing.

'Moreover, the facts he had just imparted to me in connection with his affair of honour were in themselves curious enough to suggest something still more singular in the background. A quarrel was wantonly provoked in Berlin by a stranger, who, nevertheless, failed to appear on the field. Subsequently, a second insult was thrust upon my pupil in Paris. Evidently, a plot existed against him, the second attempt to force him into a duel being made because the first had fallen through.

'Therefore, it was with a good deal of curiosity that I set out to make inquiries. I had, naturally, many acquaintances amongst the police and officials connected with our Bureau of Foreign Affairs, as in my profession I had occasional need of the information with which they alone could supply me.

'The details of Captain Brerliam's recent experiences were quickly in my possession. They were briefly as follows:

'Monsieur le Capitaine had gone to Germany for the purpose of studying the language. He had the *entrée* to the best circles, and, in due course, met the beautiful young Countess von Erdenheim, with the result which might have been expected where there is beauty on the one side and so forceful and attractive a personality upon the other. The Countess was the ward of her brother, who bore a somewhat sinister reputation, and was known to entertain other views for her future. The Count challenged the young man, but the Captain refused to meet him on the ground that he did not intend to kill the Count or to be killed by him, as in either case his marriage with the lady would be rendered impossible. Ah, but how characteristic of his nation! You English make a definite future, to which you will sacrifice the present without flinching.

'Disappointed in his first attempt to rid himself of the unwelcome suitor, had the Count von Erdenheim engaged the services of a friend to dispose of the business? It was certainly singular that Captain Brerliam should have been called out again within a few days, the pretext being that Monsieur le Capitaine had trodden upon the toes of his adversary, a gentleman who had no apparent connection or even acquaintance with the Count. But on that point all who knew of the matter drew their own conclusions.

'Captain Brerliam, being unskilled with the rapier, and having choice of weapons, decided to fight with heavy American revolvers at ten paces. When he arrived at the spot appointed for the meeting he found no antagonist, who had, as it afterwards transpired, disappeared altogether from Berlin.

'I may inform you that it was at this point of the story that I formed an opinion which later proved of some value.

'Such an occurrence caused, as you may suppose, a very pretty scandal in Berlin, so that it was impossible for some days to enter any place of public resort without hearing from one direction or another a new and extraordinary version of this strange affair. As for Monsieur le Capitaine, he found his position in society intolerable, and consequently removed to Paris, where, a few days after his arrival, he was publicly insulted by Monsieur von Stulbach, so that he had no option but to challenge the fellow. Von Stulbach accepted a meeting, the weapons to be swords.

'On carefully reconsidering all these facts, I found myself more than ever persuaded that my first almost instinctive supposition must be the correct one.

'On the following morning Monsieur le Capitaine appeared for his lesson. Alas, monsieur! I found him impossible, absolutely impossible!

'I tried him with a little loose play. *Ma foi!* he was full of crude strength; but of what use is that, monsieur? You are aware that it not infrequently forms a serious hindrance to the improvement of a pupil. Finesse is of all things the most requisite, and that Captain Brerliam possessed not at all. He confined himself to the simple attack, lunging

furiously and eagerly, with the head carried well forward. Figure to yourself my despair!

'"Well," said he, when we ceased for an interval, "what do you think of my chance?"

'What could I say? It seemed to me hopeless. You know that a hot-tempered person rarely is a good fencer. I had had to do with many a fiery blood in my time, but never any to equal this black-haired Englishman.

'"Monsieur must guard himself more assiduously," I said.

'"I don't mind about guarding," he replied. "It's for the other man to do that."

'Imagine this type of a man!

'"But," I interposed, "it may be Monsieur von Stulbach who will achieve the attack."

'"Eh, what's that? I don't know, of course; but I won't give him the chance if I can help it. For my part, I am better with the gloves than with these bodkins, as you have seen for yourself."

'All this troubled me more and more, for not only had I formed a sentiment of liking for my client, but also I had a reputation to maintain.

'I gave him some instructions, and we set to a second time. I pitied him, monsieur. I pitied this fine young man. He attacked wildly, roughly, lunge upon lunge, three parts of his body uncovered and at the mercy of his enemy's blade. One could have pierced him in twenty places. He said that he had learnt somewhat of the art at your St Cyr, your military college—but how much? Just sufficient to be dangerous to himself!

'I reiterated my cautions, and urged him to engage with his intelligence as well as his rapier; but he persistently repeated:

'"My only chance is to rush him. I have no science, I know, therefore show me how to rush him."

'Then he asked me if I had any information about Von Stulbach to give him.

'I replied that so far I had been unable to learn more than he already knew.

'"Perhaps I should give you one other hint," said he. "Von Stulbach reminded me oddly of the man whose courage failed him at Berlin."

'This communication did not surprise me; I was, indeed, prepared for it. However, as soon as my duties permitted me, I sought out a friend of mine, who is *au fait* with all the gossip of all the cities of Europe. It was a cold, wet evening, and I congratulated myself on meeting Hallard as I approached the café which I knew he frequented. We entered amid the tinkle of glasses and that vivacious sound of conversation which is so conspicuously absent from the melancholy meals one partakes of in the restaurants of monsieur's native land.

'We chatted on casually for a time, though all the while I was leading up to my subject carefully. I was truly lucky on that occasion, for Hallard proved to have been an eye-witness of the quarrel between my Captain and M. von Stulbach. I begged him to describe what had taken place.

'"That is easy," he replied, "since the affair

occurred precisely within these walls. The Englishman was seated alone when Von Stulbach arrived and placed himself at the adjacent table in that corner. Of a sudden there is a scramble, some loud words, a table is overthrown, and Von Stulbach has the Englishman's wine trickling down his face."

"I questioned Hallard, who, it seemed to me, was piquing my curiosity with a purpose—openly concealing, as it were, something more interesting, until he should have worked me up into that condition of eagerness to hear which renders it a peculiar pleasure to narrate.

"M. von Stulbach still comes here every evening?" I said. "Pray point him out."

"Ah, patience, my friend; he arrives a trifle later. He interests you?"

"Naturally. Persons concerned in affairs of honour are always objects of interest to one of my profession."

"Yes, yes; like the sharks one reads of in the books of travel, you scent blood!"

Hallard was still exulting over this piece of wit when a new arrival took his place at a short distance from us. He was a vigorous-looking man with a strong black beard.

"It is he," said Hallard softly. "As to the Englishman, he has no longer to live than the date of the meeting. It is said this Von Stulbach could give points to our first fencers here in Paris," and he threw at me a glance of raillery.

"Upon this I turned and stared at Von Stulbach. He was seated sternly alone, his black beard within three inches of his long black glass of coffee. He glared at every one who approached the table with a forbidding aspect, and smoked slowly as a man who thinks. Presently he lifted his eyes and met mine fixed upon him. I did not remove my gaze. As for my conduct, monsieur must remember how much there was at stake. M. von Stulbach returned my glance rudely.

"You interest yourself peculiarly in me, monsieur," he said in his thick German-French.

"It is true," I replied politely.

"He rose and stood over me. 'I permit to

no one an impertinent curiosity in my affairs," he growled.

"I rose also. 'Monsieur mistakes,' I said:

'There had fallen a silence upon the assemblage, now there arose a laugh and an excited whispering. In those days, monsieur, I was not without a reputation.

"I make no mistakes," returned Von Stulbach slowly, overbearingly. "But perhaps monsieur has his own reasons for avoiding a meeting."

"The insolence of the sneer was intolerable.

"M. von Stulbach is the first who has insinuated as much," I answered, and I handed him my card.

"Another gentleman now joined our group with a bow, and said to the German:

"This," and he indicated me, "is M. Desterre, one of our most celebrated fencing-masters."

"What of that?" cried the other. "We of Stuttgart can hold our own"—then he checked himself.

"Ah, so," returned the gentleman re-seating himself.

"From my elevation as I stood I looked round. Every eye was upon us. Some of those present sat with their hands arrested in the act to drink, and some smoked hurriedly.

"In the meantime Von Stulbach was engaged in studying my card. At last he turned to me haughtily:

"I need scarcely say that this matter can go no further between us."

"It is entirely owing to monsieur that it has gone so far," I answered.

"Von Stulbach, without taking any further notice of me, delivered a challenging look round the room, and stalked out.

"Upon his departure the tables fell on the instant into a babel of discussion. For my own part I was anxious to give myself up to consideration of this strange incident; therefore, eluding the desire of Hallard to detain me, I hurried to my house, and, after some deliberation, sent a telegram to an old pupil of my own who was at that time residing in Stuttgart.

THE AFRICAN GUANO ISLANDS.



NOTWITHSTANDING the advanced state of development attained by the modern art of globe-trotting, and the comprehensive accomplishments of its numerous votaries, there still remain some spots on our planet not the least charm of which lies in the fact of their being outside the ordinary highways of travel. Away in the South Atlantic, lying between latitude 28° S. and 24° S., quite out of the track of steamers and sailing vessels ploughing the ocean between England and the Cape of Good Hope, and fringing the shores of

Great Namaqualand and German Damaraland, are a dozen islands, bleak, barren, and unpromising in themselves beyond description, and yet the natural depôt of one of the most fertilising agents known to commerce. Their names are Plum-pudding, Albatross, Sinclairs, Pomona, Long, Possession, Halifax, Seal, Penguin, Ichaboe, Mercury, and Hollamsbird Islands, the largest some three miles long by half-a-mile in breadth, and the smallest a mere islet of rock.

By an act of parliament passed in 1874, these islands, generally known as the Ichaboe group, were annexed to the Cape Colony, and for many years

were leased out to private individuals, who reaped a rich harvest as the reward of their enterprise. As the leases fell in, however, the colonial government undertook the business, the immediate management being delegated to an agent, who has hitherto been remunerated by a commission on the net yearly profits, amounting to 15 per cent. on the first £8000, 5 per cent. between £8000 and £15,000, and 3 per cent. between £15,000 and £20,000. For the last seven years the annual production has been about 2770 tons, and the cost of working is put down at £3, 5s. 7d. per ton, while the price at which guano is sold to the colonial farmers is at present £6, 10s. per ton. In England it fetches from £8 to £9; but prior to the manufacture of artificial fertilisers the market-price has been as high as £17 or £18 for first-class stuff. Each island, it should be observed, produces a different kind, or rather quality, depending more or less on the amount of sand and grit with which the guano becomes mixed; Mercury, for instance, which is nothing but a barren rock, furnishing the commodity in the most unsophisticated form, ammonia being a constituent part to the extent of no less than 19 per cent.

In consequence of certain alleged irregularities brought to light in the public prints, the government in July last resolved to appoint a commission to inquire exhaustively into the working and general administration of the islands; and, among other things, a surprise-visit was arranged, with a view to ascertaining on the spot the actual state of affairs. To this end a small steamer was chartered, and, with several officials on board, among whom was your correspondent, in the capacity of secretary, proceeded on a cruise of inspection, an opportunity being thus afforded of visiting what, to most people at all events, is a *terra incognita*.

The coastline of south-western Africa for a very considerable distance north of the Cape of Good Hope presents but few features of interest; indeed it may be described as a wearisome and monotonous picture of barren-looking rocks, alternating with long, arid stretches of sand-dunes, the desolation of the scene being completed by the angry surf which with ceaseless and depressing rhythm beats upon the shore. At the same time, the atmosphere in these comparatively rainless latitudes is singularly pure and invigorating; one feels as if it were almost a luxury to breathe; and when night closes in, the starry heavens present a glorious spectacle to the eye, while all around the vessel the sea flashes and sparkles with the phosphorescent rays emitted by countless forms of marine life.

Possession Island, the largest of the group, is about five hundred miles from Capetown, and viewed from a short distance off looks uncommonly like a huge drab-coloured clinker set down in mid-ocean. It is crescent-shaped, and shelters Eliza-

beth Bay from the westward, the mainland being well defined in the distance. On nearer approach one experiences a sensation much akin to that induced by a theatrical transformation-scene, the forbidding and apparently untenanted waste being alive with birds enjoying to the full the immunity secured from predatory foes, and showing but little sign of timidity from outside intrusion. Thousands upon thousands of penguins line the shore, strutting about with great self-importance, and jealous, one might almost imagine, that Nature has not endowed them with the power of flight like their comrades, the malagas, a very handsome bird about the size of an ordinary goose, and with much the same plumage except that the head and neck are tinted with yellowish feathers. Enormous flocks of these malagas are to be seen in every direction, either standing in solid groups, covering a large extent of ground, or wheeling about in the air, now and then darting out seawards in quest of fish, upon which they pounce with unerring accuracy. Then there are various kinds of gulls, guillemots, and other sea-birds. In July and August is the breeding season, and it is not till later in the year that the islands are what is technically called 'in full bloom,' when the birds are more numerous than ever. Some of the habits of the penguin are very peculiar. Their nests consist of a hole scratched in the sand, or just a crevice in the rock, into which they drag a few stones, pieces of seaweed, or any rubbish available; and here they deposit two, or at the most three, eggs, the period of incubation lasting six weeks. When the young birds are hatched they very quickly take to the water. Shortly after the breeding season is concluded, the work of collecting the guano or excrement begins; and this on the larger islands furnishes employment for thirty or forty hands, the ranks being recruited from all sorts and conditions of men, even a broken-down barrister having been known to cast in his lot amidst these untoward surroundings. At the time of the visit of the commission there were over 2000 tons of guano stacked on this island in a large heap, representing a money-value of close upon £15,000. At one time Possession Island must have been the haunt of innumerable quantities of seals, for the remains of these creatures are to be seen in all directions, abundantly confirming the statement of Captain Morrell, who, when describing his visit here many years since, said, 'I saw the effects of a pestilence or plague which had visited these inhabitants of the ocean with as much malignancy as the Asiatic cholera does the bipeds of the land. The whole island was literally covered with the carcasses of fur-seals, with their skins still on them. They appeared to have been dead about five years, and it was evident they had all met their fate about the same period. From the immense multitude of bones and carcasses, not less than half-a-million must have perished, either through some mysteri-

ous plague or disease, or from the effects of a sand-storm.'

The accommodation on Possession Island for the men employed far surpasses that on any of the others, and consists of a substantial wood and iron building and store in close proximity to the beach, where a rough kind of jetty has been constructed to facilitate the shipment of guano. There is also a small cooperage where the water-casks are repaired. Not a drop of fresh water is to be found on any of the islands, and the conveyance of water from Capetown is consequently an important business. An attempt has been made to condense sea-water by solar heat, an apparatus something like a cucumber-frame being used for the purpose; but the birds frequently interfere with its successful manipulation.

On Possession, Halifax, and Ichaboe Islands headmen are stationed, whose duty it is to control the collection and shipment of the guano and generally supervise the working on these and the smaller neighbouring islands. None of them are men of any very great intelligence, but they manage to keep a log-book or diary, in which daily occurrences as well as the amount of labour performed are noted down. The stores and medicines are also under their charge. Under no circumstances is any liquor allowed on the islands, a severe privation to many of the men, who have sometimes been known to drink, with great gusto, paregoric, Friar's balsam, and other medicinal remedies containing alcohol.

Halifax Island is about thirty miles farther north, and within a very short distance of the German settlement at Angra Pequena. There were five men here—the headman an Italian, and the others hailing from France, Sweden, St Helena, and Capetown respectively. The quarters are very poor; but the storeroom contained an ample supply of salt-beef, biscuits, meal, and other necessaries. The absence of fresh meat and vegetables is sorely felt, and at times leads to attacks of scurvy among the men. To a flagstaff, from which floats the Union Jack, an old, weather-beaten board is affixed, bearing the inscription: 'Halifax Island: taken possession of by Capt. C. C. Forsyth, of H.M.S. *Valorous*, May 7, 1866, in the name of Her Britannic Majesty Queen Victoria. God save the Queen.'

On Diaz Point, close by, is a rough wooden beacon; formerly there was a marble cross erected by the famous navigator, Bartholomew Diaz. The pedestal was in its place in 1825, but the whole of this interesting landmark has now disappeared.

Seal and Penguin Islands, both small in extent, lie just at the entrance to Angra Pequena Bay, the latter being almost entirely the abode of the guillemot, a black bird with a patch of white feathers on the back, and about the size of a wild duck. At the time of my visit there was nobody on this island, but a small stock of provisions is kept in a wooden shanty for the benefit

of the men who come at intervals to collect the guano. Still farther to the north lies Ichaboe, an island composed of granite, slate, and quartz, a little less than a mile in circumference, and distant something over half-a-mile from the mainland. In former days large numbers of vessels anchored here to load the fertilising ordure, which once rose, it is said, to a height of seventy-five feet, the deposit probably of centuries. The island itself lies low, and is not at any point more than thirty feet high. It would be difficult to find in hazy weather were it not for a conspicuous spar placed at the southern end, and bearing an inscription rendered well-nigh illegible through time and atmospherical conditions: 'Notice.—This island of Ichaboe is this day taken possession of for and in the name of Her Britannic Majesty Queen Victoria; and is hereby declared a dependency of . . . (Signed) . . . Captain, H.M.S. *Furious*. June 21, 1861. All claims as to soil or territory in Ichaboe are to be made to His Excellency the Governor of the Cape of Good Hope. God save the Queen.' Many graves are to be seen here, one of them containing the remains of a Scotsman who for no less than thirty-nine years made the island his home. At another spot part of a skeleton is to be seen, the rocky nature of the ground not allowing of very effectual interment. In striking contrast with the silent home of the dead is the animation displayed by the feathered inhabitants, whose graceful movements and busy activity one might watch for hours without tiring.

After quitting Ichaboe, the coastline for some little distance assumes a bolder aspect, and Dolphin Head, the southern extremity of Spencer Bay, is a very prominent headland, a massive wall of rock rising abruptly and almost perpendicularly from the water's edge to 600 or 700 feet in height, against which the sea beats with great violence.

About a mile and a half from the mainland lies Mercury Island, a gigantic rock, conical in form, with a length north and south of about half-a-mile. The highest point is 160 feet above the sea-level, and from this eminence an extensive view is obtained, the general physical aspect not only of the island but of the contiguous continent being indicative of an extensive volcanic convulsion of nature at some remote period of the world's history. Here, again, life and death are significantly contrasted, one of the first objects that strike the eye on landing being the laconic epitaph painted on the smooth face of the rock: 'C. Abrahams, died 2d July 1890.' This island is of surpassing interest to lovers of Nature in her sterner mood; and many hours might be enjoyably spent in exploring its recesses, one of the principal points being an immense fissure or tunnel which bisects the rock, opening out at one place into a huge arched chamber, a hundred feet high or more, the sides of which have been carved and fashioned into

weird and fantastic shapes, while beneath sea-anemones of lovely hues, and other singular marine specimens, fascinate the eye. The guano on Mercury lies in thick profusion in many parts, as it has not been collected for more than a twelvemonth; indeed, a considerable quantity is being washed away by the sea, which in heavy weather submerges the low-lying portions. The accommodation is of the poorest and most meagre description, and fast going to decay; the marvel is how human beings can ever manage to exist in such a miserable hovel. Hollamsbird Island is seventy-five miles farther up the coast, and is the most isolated of the group, as it lies nine miles from the mainland. This also is the home of innumerable flocks of sea-birds; and as many

as fourteen hundred fur-seals have been captured at one time, the custom being to club them on the head. They are very easily frightened away from their haunts, and can even detect a steamer's smoke a long distance off. Sealing operations in these parts have been suspended for some time past.

In addition to the islands comprised in the Ichaboe group, there are some others nearer the Cape peninsula which go by the name of the Colonial Islands. Not only do they contribute largely to the guano supply, but a considerable revenue accrues also from the sale of penguin eggs, which are much appreciated, the privilege of collecting them being put up to tender annually by the government.

JOHN BURNET OF BARNES.

By JOHN BUCHAN.

CHAPTER XXIX.—I WITNESS A VALIANT ENDING.



THEY had scarce been five minutes gone when the full folly of my action dawned upon me. To be sure, I had saved the miller from death, but I had now put my own neck in the noose. I had given them a clue to my whereabouts: more, I had brought the hunt down on lower Tweeddale which before had been left all but unmolested. It was war to the knife. I could look for no quarter, and my only chance lay in outstripping my pursuers. The dragoons dared not return immediately, for four unarmed soldiers would scarcely face two resolute men fully armed and strongly posted. They could only ride to Abington, and bring the whole hornets' nest down on my head.

Another reflection had been given to me by the sight of these men. In all likelihood Gilbert had now returned and resumed the chief command of the troop, for otherwise there would have been no meaning in the journey to Dawyck and lower Tweeddale which these fellows had taken. And now that my dear cousin had come back, I might look for action. There was now no more any question of foolish and sluggish soldiery to elude, but a man of experience and, as I knew well, of unmatched subtlety.

The miller was for thanking me on knees for my timely succour, but I cut him short. 'There is no time,' said I, 'for long thanks. You must take to the hills; and if you follow my advice you will hold over to the Westlands, where your friends are, and so keep the pursuit from Tweeddale, which little deserves it. As for myself, I will go up the Wormel, and hide among the serogs of birk till evening. For the hills are too bare and the light too clear to travel by day.

To be kenspeckle in these times is a doubtful advantage.'

So, without more ado, I took myself off, crossed the fields with great caution, and going up a little glen in the side of the big hill, found a very secure hiding-place in the lee of a Craig among a tangle of hazel-bushes. I had taken some food with me from the mill to provision me during my night journey, and now I used a little of it for my afternoon meal. In this place I lay all the pleasant hours after midday till I saw the shadows lengthen and the sun flaming to its setting over the back of Caerdon. Then the cool spring darkness came down on the earth, and I rose and shook myself and set out on my way.

I shall ever remember that long night walk over hill and dale to the Cor Water. The way was over the Wormel and the Logan Burn hills as far as Kingledoors. There I forded Tweed and struck over the low ridge to Talla Water. Thence the way was straight, and much the same as that which I had come with Marjory. But now I had no such dear escort, and I give my word that my limbs ached and my head swam oftentimes ere I reached my journey's end.

It was early dawning when I crossed the last ridge and entered the Cor Water valley. I found that, short as had been my absence, I had almost forgotten the entrance to the cave, and it was not without difficulty that I made out the narrow aperture in the slate-gray rock, and entered.

In the first chamber all was dark, which struck me with astonishment, since at five o'clock on a good spring day folk should be stirring. But all was still, and it was not till I had come into the second chamber, which, as I have told, was the largest in the place, that there were any signs of

life. The faint struggling light was yet sufficient to see with, and by its aid I made out the old man who had spoken with me on that first night of my journey.

He was sitting alone, staring before him as is the way with the blind; but at the sound of my steps he rose slowly to his feet. One could see that the natural acuteness of his hearing was little impaired by years. I paused at the threshold, and he stood listening; then he sank back in his seat as if convinced it was no enemy.

'Come in, John Burnet,' he said. 'I ken you weel. How have you fared since you left us? I trust you have placed the maid in safe keeping.'

I had heard before of that marvellous quickness of perception which they possess who have lost some other faculty; but I had never yet had illustration of it. So I was somewhat surprised, as I told him that all as yet was well, and that my lady was in good hands.

'It is well,' said he; 'and, Master Burnet, I fear you have come back to a desolate lodging. As ye see, all are gone and only I am left. Yestreen word came that that had happened which we had long expected. There was once a man among us whom we cast out for evil living. He has proved the traitor, and there is no more safety here. They scattered last night, the puir, feckless folk, to do for themselves among the moors and mosses, and I am left here to wait for the coming of the enemy.'

'Do you hold your life so cheap,' I cried, 'that you would cast it away thus? I dare not suffer you to bide here. I would be a coward indeed if I did not take care of you.'

A gleam of something like pleasure passed over his worn face. But he spoke gravely. 'No, you are too young and proud and hot in blood. You think that a strong arm and a stout heart can do all. But I have a work to do in which none can hinder me. My life is dear to me, and I would use it for the best. But you, too, are in danger here; the soldiers may come at any moment. If you go far to the back you'll find a narrow way up which you can crawl. It'll bring ye out on the backside of the hill. Keep it well in mind, lad, when the time comes. But now, sit ye down, and give us your crack. There's a heap o' things I want to speir at ye. And first, how is auld Veitch at Smitwood? I once kened him weel, when he was a young 'prising lad; but now I hear he's sair fallen in years and gien ower to the pleasures of eating and drinking.'

I told him all of the laird of Smitwood that I could remember.

'It would be bonny on the muirs o' Clyde in this weather. I havena been out o' doors for mony a day, but I would like fine to feel the hill-wind and the sun on my cheek. I was aye used wi' the open air,' and his voice had a note of sorrow.

To me it seemed a strange thing that in the

presence of the most deadly danger this man should be so easy and undisturbed. I confess that I myself had many misgivings and something almost approaching fear. There was no possibility of escape now, for though one made his way out of the cave when the soldiers came, there was little hiding on the bare hillside. This of course was what the old man meant when he bade me stay and refused to go out of doors. It was more than I could do to leave him, but yet I ever feared the very thought of dying like a rat in a hole. My forebodings of my death had always been of an open, windy place, with a drawn sword, and more than one man dead before me. It was with downcast eyes that I waited for the inevitable end, striving to commend my soul to God and repent of my past follies.

Suddenly some noise came to the quick ear of the old man, and he stood up quivering.

'John,' he cried, 'John, my lad, gang to the place I told ye. Ye'll find the hole where I said it was; and once there, ye needna fear.'

'Twas true I was afraid, but I had given no signs of fear, and he had little cause to speak of it. 'Nay,' I said haughtily, 'I will not move from your side. It were a dastardly thing to leave you, and the two of us together may account for some of the fiends. Besides, there is as much chance of life here as out on the brae-side, where a man can be seen for miles.'

He gripped me fiercely by the arm so that I almost cried out for pain, and his voice came shrill and strange. 'Gang where I tell ye, ye puir fool. Is this a time for sinfu' pride o' honour or mettle? Ye know not what evil is coming upon these men. Gang quick, lest ye share it also.'

Something in his voice, in his eye, overcame me and I turned to obey him.

As I went he laid his hand on my head. 'The blessing o' man availeth little; but I pray God that He be ever near you and your house, and that ye may soon hae a happy deliverance from all your afflictions. God bless and keep ye ever, and bring ye at the end to His ain place.'

With a heart beating wildly between excitement and sorrow, I found the narrow crevice, and crept upward till I came to the turning which led to the air. Here I might have safely hid for long, and I was just on the point of going back to the old man and forcing him to come with me to the same place of refuge, when I heard the sound of men.

From my vantage-ground I could see the whole cave clearly and well. I could hear the noise of soldiers fumbling about the entrance, and the voice of the informer telling the way. I could hear the feet stumbling along the passage, the clink of weapons, and muttered words of annoyance; and then, as I peered warily forth, I saw the band file into the cave where sat the old man

alone. It was as I expected: they were some twenty men of my cousin's company, strangers to me for the most. But what troubled my thoughts was that Gilbert was not with them.

'By God, they're off,' said the foremost, 'and nothing left but this auld dotterel. This is a puir haul. Look you here, you fellow,' turning to the guide, 'you are a liar and a scoundrel, and if your thick hide doesna taste the flat o' my sword ere ye're five hours aulder my name's no' Peter Moriston.—You (this to the old man), what's your name, brother well-beloved in the Lord?'

At their first coming he had risen to his feet and taken his stand in the middle of the cave, by the two great stone shafts which kept up the roof, for all the world like the pillars in some mighty temple. There he stood looking over their heads at something beyond, with a strange, almost pitying smile, which grew by degrees into a frown of anger.

'Ye've come here to taunt me,' said he; 'but the Lord has prepared for you a speedy visitation. Puir fools, ye shall go down quick to the bottomless pit like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and none shall be left to tell the tale of you. Ye have led braw lives. Ye have robbed the widow and the fatherless, ye have slain by your numbers men ye darena have come near singly, ye have been the devil's own braw servants, and, lads, ye'll very soon get your wages. Ye have made thae bonny lands o' Tweedside fit to spew ye forth for your wickedness. And ye think that there is nae jealous God in heaven watching ower you and your doings, and biding His time to repay. But, lads, ye're wrang for once. The men ye thocht to take are by this time far from ye, and there is only one left, an auld feckless man that will no' bring muckle credit to ye. But God has ordained that ye shall never leave here, but mix your banes to a' time wi' the hillside stanes. God hae pity on your souls, ye that had nae pity on others in your lives.'

And, even as I watched, the end came sudden and awful. Stretching out his great arms, he caught the two stone shafts, and with one mighty effort pushed them asunder. I held my breath with horror. With a roar like a world falling, the roof came down, and the great hillside sank among a ruin of rock. I was blinded by dust even in my secure seat, and driven half-mad with terror and grief. I know not how I got to the air; but by God's good providence the passage where I lay was distinct from the cave, and a rift in the solid rock. As it was, I had to fight with falling splinters and choking dust all the way. At last—and it seemed ages—I felt free air and a glimmer of light; and with one fresh effort crawled out beneath a tuft of bracken.

And this is why at this day there is no cave at the Cor Water, nothing but the bare side of a hill strewn with stones.

When I gained breath to raise myself and look around, the sight was strange indeed. The vast cloud of dust was beginning to settle, and the whole desolation lay clear. I know not how to tell of it. It was like some battlefield of giants of old time. Great rocks lay scattered amid the beds of earth and shingle, and high up toward the brow of the hill one single bald scarp showed where the fall had ended.

A hundred yards away, by his horse's side, gazing with wild eyes at the scene, stood a dragoon, doubtless the one whom the ill-fated company had set for guard. I hastened toward him as fast as my weak knees would carry me, and I saw without surprise that he was the Dutchman, Jan Hamman, whom I had already met thrice before. He scarce was aware of my presence, but stood weeping with weakness and terror. I took him by the shoulder and shook him, until at last I had brought him back to his senses, and he knew me.

'Where are they gone?' and he pointed feebly with his finger to the downfall.

'To their own place,' I said shortly. 'But tell me one word: where is your captain, Gilbert Burnet, that he is not with you to-day?'

The man looked at me curiously.

'He is gone on another errand, down Tweed toward Peebles.'

Then I knew he was seeking for Marjory high and low, and would never rest till he found her.

'I will let you go,' said I to the man, 'that you may carry the tidings to the rest. Begone with you, quick. I am in no mood to look on such as you this day.'

The man turned and was riding off, when he stopped for one word. 'You think,' he said, 'that I am your enemy and your cousin's friend, and that I serve under the captain for his own sweet sake. I will tell you my tale. Three years ago this Captain Gilbert Burnet was in Leyden, and there also was I, a happy reputable man, prosperous and contented, with the prettiest sweetheart in all the town. Then came this man. I need not tell what he did. In a year he had won over the silly girl to his own desires, and I was a ruined man for evermore. I am a servant in his company who worked my fall. Remember then that the nearer I am to Gilbert Burnet the worse it will fare with him.' And he rode off still pale and shivering with terror.

I mused for some time with myself. Truly, thought I, Gilbert has his own troubles, and it will go hard with him if his own men turn against him. And I set it down in my mind that I would do my best to warn him of the schemes of the foreigner. For, though it was my cousin's own ill-doing that had brought him to this, and my heart burned against him for his villainy, it was yet right that a kinsman should protect one of the house against the plots of a common soldier.

RABBITS AND RABBIT-WARRENS.



What period rabbits were first introduced into the British Isles is a matter of speculation; but it appears almost certain that they were first brought over from Africa to Spain, from whence they gradually spread throughout the whole of Southern and Western Europe, which, being temperate in climate, forms a fitting habitat for the *Lepus cuniculus*. In Northern Europe the rabbit appears to be almost, if not totally, unknown; probably not so much on account of the lowness of temperature as from dearth of food and the deep snows which for long periods cover what little there is to sustain life. Coney is another name for the rabbit; but the coney of Scripture, the eating of whose flesh the Mosaic law prohibited, was the Daman or Hyrax—a totally different animal.

But for the flesh of the rabbit, many of the poorer classes of people who live near the rabbit-warrens of East Anglia would come poorly off for animal food, the wages of the farm-labourers not being sufficient to provide butcher-meat for themselves and families except on rare occasions. To these poor agriculturists the rabbit, either floating in a sea of stew or more rarely baked with a mountain of potatoes, is a positive necessity, and is enjoyed by every member of the family; while the taste of a hare—the rabbit's big brother—is in most cases absolutely unknown. Indeed, the very fact of a hare being seen in a poor man's cottage would go far to stamp him as dishonest; for while the rabbit is regarded as peculiarly the poor man's food, until recently being classed among vermin, the hare is considered as game, and therefore fitting only for the table of the landlord or landowner.

Yet, from a naturalist's point of view, the hare and rabbit are of the same family, although there are striking points of difference between the two. A hare will weigh as much as three ordinary wild rabbits, and in the market is just about three times its value. A hare is contented with a shallow depression in a field (its 'form') for its residence; but the rabbit, with its energetic little feet, burrows out for itself a comfortable home, where it is safe from the inclemency of the weather, wind, and rain.

In the number of its progeny the rabbit is far ahead of the hare. Hares commence to breed when they are about twelve months old, and bring forth from two to five at a birth about four times a year; whilst the rabbit, commencing to breed at six months old, has from five to eight young ones five or six times during the season.

Young hares, however, have a distinct advantage over young rabbits, as they are born covered with hair and with their eyes wide open to all around

them. The poor little 'bunnies,' on the other hand, come into the world both blind and naked. Hair soon begins to show itself on their smooth little bodies; but they do not receive their sight until ten or twelve days after birth.

As food, the flesh of the rabbit compares very favourably with that of the hare, being whiter, less dense in fibre, and therefore more easy of digestion, and of delicate flavour—qualities which render it almost equal to the flesh of poultry both for young children and invalid adults.

Rabbits are usually classed under four heads—namely, 'warreners,' 'parkers,' 'hedgehogs,' and 'sweethearts.'

The first kind, as the name implies, are in the habit of making their homes in burrows in open grounds or warrens; the 'hedgehogs' are found in banks surrounding fields, in woods, and places where the soil is not sufficiently light or sandy for them to form subterranean dwellings, and are distinguished from the 'warreners' by having less fur on their backs. The 'parker' lives and breeds on park-land or flat pasturage, and is indistinguishable from the last kind except to the expert eye of professional warreners. 'Sweethearts' is the generic name for the whole class of tame rabbits now multiplied into endless varieties in colour, form, and size. Some of this variety will weigh ten pounds—a weight which would be reckoned heavy even for a hare; but as there is in such cases more fat than flesh, they are not so profitable for the table as less gross animals.

The wild doe-rabbit makes an excellent mother, being most solicitous for the welfare of her progeny. The young are always produced in a separate burrow, which is lined with soft grass and made warm by the fluffy, soft fur which the mother plucks from her own body. When the young are born she regularly suckles them at night, going forth during the daylight to nibble the succulent grasses for her own sustenance. At such times she exercises great care for the safety of her young, pulling into the burrow a quantity of grass and earth, with which she makes a firm barrier to exclude all intruders and to ensure the warmth and comfort of her 'clutch.' It is said that this blocking of her especial burrow or nursery is to exclude the male rabbits, who at times are so fond of the young ones as to devour them. Probably when food is good and plentiful this would not occur; but when food is scarce and the weather cold or wet the buck turns cannibal, and sometimes eschews vegetable for animal food. It is not till the young have been under their mother's care for about a month that they are allowed to leave the burrow and nibble their way in the world, by which time the doe is getting ready to once more exercise the cares of maternity upon a second family.

What do rabbits eat? They will eat almost anything purely vegetable; but, as some foods are better for them than others, it is the warrener's care to provide them with the best diet. Grasses of various kinds come first in the rabbit's *menu*, and these must be of good quality—fine, succulent and juicy—if the flesh of the rabbit is meant for table; if for fur only, the quality of food is not of such vital importance. In bygone years, when land was too poor for arable purposes, it was allowed to run wild as feed for sheep; or, failing to sustain a paying number of sheep, and being too bad for any other purpose, it was turned into a rabbit-warren, where half-starved, diminutive rodents were allowed to breed and multiply as best they could for the farmer's benefit. In later days it has been found that rabbits are a paying 'crop,' and that the excellence of their flesh depends greatly upon the excellence of the pasture they feed upon. Rank or dry coarse grass produces coarse, stringy rabbits, small in size and tasteless in flavour; while good, sweet, nourishing, succulent herbage produces larger, healthier, and finer-flavoured rabbits, and actually more of them.

Now, suppose a modern warren to be covered with good pasturage, affording a fine run for rabbits; yet it must not be forgotten that year after year nourishment is being taken out of the soil which supplies that grass, and consequently the native nourishment of the earth will in time become exhausted, and the grass less luxuriant and nutritious. To avoid this, every care must be taken to rejuvenate and recharge the grass with the essential materials which the rabbits, by close cropping, are taking out of it. The flesh, bones, and blood of a rabbit contain over 50 per cent. of phosphate of lime, which is obtained from the grass and herbs consumed by it. The grass obtains this supply from the soil, and the soil in time becomes so poor in lime that the rabbits, although they eat the same quantity of grass as of yore, gradually diminish both in size and number. Ask a warrener why this is, and he will probably tell you the warren is 'rabbit sick;' and he is quite correct in his surmise. But go further, and ask him why this can be when there is plenty of pasture about? He will scratch his head and try vague excuses, but never realises the true answer. The fact is, he has been taking tons of phosphate of lime from the warren (unconsciously) in the form of rabbit-flesh, and has not put any back; consequently, the grass to the eye is as plentiful as ever, but it lacks that which goes to build up animal flesh, blood, and bone. The soil has become exhausted of its most requisite constituent—lime, and the owner's pocket suffers accordingly.

How can a warren be brought up to a normal state of nourishing efficiency and maintained so? In a very simple manner. On all land, except the warren, the steward or owner expects to be at some cost for tillage and labour; but in

nine cases out of ten the poor warren is simply neglected by the husbandman, and looked upon as worthless, except that it raises a few rabbits, and no thought is ever given to its improvement. Let those who have warrens, either large or small, give them a little thought, and go to a little, only a little, expense over them, and they may double their stock of rabbits and increase their value, both as to skins and flesh.

Lime is cheap in almost every part of Great Britain; and after clearing the ground of all rubbish and detrimental weeds, the pasturage should be well spread with lime, broken small. This may be the ordinary lime; or if a gas-work be near, gas-lime will do just as well, although much cheaper, and may be had for about eighteenpence per ton. Rabbits have no aversion to gas-lime on account of its smell, for Mr Simpson, warrener to Lord Wharnccliffe, has tried it with favourable results, and avers that rabbits will even make their burrows in it if placed in large heaps. He advocates its use very strongly, and recommends that it should be applied about October or November, after the rabbits have been marketed.

From two to four tons per acre may be applied, with the result that the soil will be replenished, the nourishing properties of the grass renewed, and the average weight of the rabbits increased several ounces all round; beside which, the improved health of the rabbits causes them to increase more rapidly, and thus add greatly in every way to the value of the warren.

Furze is a delight to rabbits, which devour the young shoots greedily, much to their benefit; for, although not generally known, furze is a most valuable rough food for both rabbits and other animals upon a farm. Contrast furze with two other foods of which animals are fond, and its value will at once be apparent. Swede turnips contain 1.94 per cent. of flesh-formers and 5.93 per cent. heat-producers; carrots, 0.60 and 10.18 per cent. respectively; while furze contains 3.21 per cent. of flesh-formers and 9.38 per cent. of heat-producers.

It will be found to pay the warren-owner to give children a trifle to gather acorns, of which rabbits are very fond, and on which they become quite fat. Probably the finest flavoured rabbits are those raised on warrens where juniper bushes are plentiful, for rodents of all kinds are very fond of the leaves of this tree; and rabbits which have a plentiful supply are highly prized by epicures because of the aroma and flavour imparted to their flesh.

A very good way of bringing grass to high condition is to plentifully sprinkle it with salt in the early spring, say at the end of March or beginning of April. Such a dressing will be found to make the grass eat short and tender to any grass-eating animals, whether cattle, deer, or rabbits, and is very beneficial for their health.

So fond are they of salt-strewn grass that they will forsake other parts of a pasture for a salted patch and will not leave it till it is bare of grass. Salt might be used with advantage to the extent of from one to three hundredweight per acre—the lesser quantity for warrens near the coast, and the larger when the warren is far inland.

Formerly rabbits were found on the roughest of rough ground; but now that the landowner begins to see that rabbits may be made to pay better than many other crops, his broad acres of pasture-land are being in many places turned into profitable warrens. In our grandfathers' days, before the invention of wire-netting, warrens were so expensive to enclose that most of them were without boundaries of any kind, and consequently were at the mercy of poachers and rapacious birds and animals. When wire-netting was unknown, an owner wishing to enclose a warren had to have a fence built all round the area to be cut off from the rest of his estate, and this was both a long and expensive task. The fence was an embankment of earth usually about four feet high and three feet wide (or thick). It was faced with turf and capped with furze, which projected eight or ten inches beyond the face. This was usually carried out on the piecework system, and its cost must have been very considerable. Wire-netting has altered all this, both as to time occupied in enclosing a warren and the cost of so doing.

A level country is unfitted for a warren, although very convenient for the plough; besides which, the rabbit does not delight in flat pastures, for he finds it very difficult to make his burrow in it, as all the sandy loam he digs out has to be dragged upward to the surface; whereas if he can set to work to form his home by excavating into the side of a hillock, bank, or sloping meadow, the acclivity affords him a ready vent for the loose soil, and his task is to send it downhill from the working, making his toil infinitely lighter and his home more weatherproof. A warren is, therefore, best made in broken, hilly land, where some shelter is afforded it by trees or banks from any prevalent cold winds. Another reason why a warren should never be formed on flat land is the danger from rain: a sudden downpour results in the destruction of scores of young rabbits in such places, as the rain, finding a ready entrance to the burrows, rushes in and drowns them in their fur-lined nests.

The ground being selected, a row of rough posts about 3 or 4 inches in diameter and a little more than 5 feet long, are driven into the ground, from 3 to 4 feet apart, so as to form an unbroken line right round the ground. Next, wire-netting 18 inches wide and of $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch mesh is fastened to the bottom of these posts in such a manner that 6 inches of it are turned down flat on the ground inwards. This leaves an upstanding barrier of netting a foot high.

Then another roll of netting 30 inches wide and of $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch mesh is fastened above this, so as to heighten the wall to an elevation of 3 feet, the remaining portion (6 inches) being turned down so as to form a flap hanging inwards also. This flap is struttled out from the posts by galvanised eyed-bolts about 7 inches long, through which an annealed wire is run all round the fence. This flap prevents rabbits from leaping out or foxes from leaping in. For the benefit of warren-owners, a wire-netting is now made, the bottom part of which is of small mesh and the upper of larger mesh; this saves much time in fixing. When necessary, the two edges of wire-net are laced together with tying wire. About 6 inches above the netting a thickly-studded barbed-wire should be fastened to the posts, so as to form a continuous guard all round the warren. Provision must be made for gateways where requisite.

On the stocking of a warren great differences of opinion exist, as much depends upon circumstances, such as the distance to market, the soil, the geographical position of the warren in the British Isles, whether reared principally for skins or flesh, and so on.

Take a small warren for example. One might start with about a score of rabbits to the acre, two-thirds of which should be does. These in one season will so stock a warren that by October three times that number may be killed, leaving an ample breeding stock for the next season.

Much judgment is required in estimating the number of rabbits a warren will sustain; but the state of the grass is usually a good criterion as to whether a warren is overstocked or understocked. In the latter case, the grass at a distance from the burrows will remain untouched, proving that many more might be reared on the same area of ground. In such a case, artificial burrows might be made so as to induce the rabbits to eat the untouched grass; fewer rabbits should be removed for market, so as to increase the breeding stock, or more rabbits introduced into the warren. With ordinary judgment it is seldom a warren is overstocked, the reverse being almost invariably the case.

The ordinary wild rabbit is very prolific, and finds a ready sale; but probably the best-paying kind is the 'silver gray,' whose skin is much sought after by the furrier.

The giant Belgian hare-rabbits have been tried on warrens, and thrive well; but although individually they are more than double the weight of the ordinary rabbit, yet it has been found that the weight of flesh taken from a warren of ordinary rabbits exceeds that from a Belgian warren when the aggregate weight per acre is taken into account.

Poor little bunny has many enemies, the principal of whom is the poacher, who plies his silent trade both in and out of season. Then

there is the fox ; but fortunately Reynard requires something firm to leap upon when he enters a warren ; and as the oscillating barbed-wire gives him no foothold, he usually cries 'Sour grapes,' and looks elsewhere for a meal. A fox, being an intelligent animal, looks out for gates whose tops

are free from shaking barbs ; so be careful to arm your gates with the dreaded wire. Among the rabbit's minor but rapacious enemies are the cat, weasel, stoat, and even rats ; and to these may be added owls, hawks, kites, and some say even rooks in hard times.

DAVID AND JONATHAN.

By 'TULLOCH ARD.'



HOSE two were simply inseparable. Their friendship dated from the time when they toddled side by side in short frocks. Together they commenced their schooldays under Ian Martin's care. They helped one another over the difficulties of two-syllabled words and simple addition. When they reached that bugbear of schoolboys, the fifth proposition in Euclid, they loyally held out to one another a helping hand, and together crossed the 'Bridge' in triumph. In the snowball fights between their school and the General Assembly's, they were invariably side by side in the forefront of the battle. On one of these occasions Davie Forbes challenged the champion of the opposing school to fight for the honour of his side. The challenge was eagerly accepted, and a desperate combat ensued, both schools looking breathlessly on. Davie barely reached his antagonist's chin, and his pluck was of small avail against the strength of the other. A well-directed blow on his nose stretched him bleeding in the snow. The victor's triumph was short-lived, for before he had time to receive the congratulations of his friends, Johnny Matheson was on him like a young lion to avenge his friend. Taken by surprise, the champion made a weak defence, and, before he had time to recover his guard, he was contemplating the sky with all the fight taken out of him. Amid the cheers of their friends, the two chums modestly retired into the ranks, their discomfited foe meanwhile breathing dire vengeance when he could catch either of them alone. They became the popular heroes of their school, and thenceforward no one had the temerity to meddle with one when the other was standing by.

Their schooldays ended (they both left the same day), they determined not to be parted if they could help it. 'As sure as death, Johnny,' said Davie Forbes, 'I'll stick to you if you'll stick to me. If my father sends me to Edinburgh and yours keeps you here, we'll'—

'I know, Davie ; we'll run away to sea.'

And they shook hands over the compact.

But their fathers had, with a fortunate unanimity of purpose, both decided on the same career for their sons. The two boys were to go to Edinburgh to study medicine.

Herrington has yielded a crop of doctors and ministers altogether out of proportion to the size of the place.

Forbes senior and Matheson senior were not above the considerations of filthy lucre ; and although neither would have objected to see his son 'wagging his head' in a pulpit, they feared the clerical market was getting overstocked, and the risk of their sons being 'P.P.s' (permanent probationers) had to be taken into account.

'It's a grand profession, is the medical,' said Forbes senior to Matheson senior. 'There's not another like it—except one, of course.'

'Except one, of course,' agreed Matheson senior. 'But I'm thinking Herrington is not the place for a doctor to make money. For the last thought in the mind of a doctor here is to make a good living out of his patients. It's philanthropists the doctors here have been, and that's a fact.'

'Well, our lads will have to try farther south. Perhaps when they have made experiments on the Sassenachs, and made money out of them, they'll come home to their own people to spend the rest of their days in the old town.'

Together the chums travelled to the Scottish seat of learning, full of the high hopes and aspirations which every Highland lad feels within him on leaving his native heath for the capital. They shared rooms as a matter of course, and passed through the varied experiences of life in city 'diggings.' They met the landlady with the useful cat, whose delinquencies furnished a text for its mistress, upon which she expatiated with all the eloquence of an ill-used martyr. But they were not so innocent, these Highland youths, to be taken in by her excuses.

'Mrs Thomson,' said Davie one day, 'your cat is too expensive a luxury for us. Its tastes are both nice and many. It has now got to do one of two things: feed like an ordinary cat or come to an untimely end. You understand?' And Mrs Thomson understood.

Another of their landladies, who had a large family, all of them fond of a good cup of tea, was in the habit of serving that beverage to her lodgers in an enormous teapot, upon the contents of which the two young men, healthy and normally thirsty although they were, could make but a comparatively small impression. Their tea bill assumed alarming proportions.

They protested against the too generous supply of the beverage for their modest requirements. But it was of no avail.

'You surely dinna expect the tea to confuse properly in a wee bit pot?' asked Mrs Tosh scornfully. 'You maun gie it room, ye ken.'

'I'll stop this, Davie,' said Johnny Matheson one morning, after they had satisfied their wants, and left the usual quantity of excellent tea; and so saying, he emptied the contents of the salt-cellar into the pot.

In the evening Johnny said significantly: 'I'm thinking, Mrs Tosh, the tea got too much "confused" this morning. The fact is, the pot is too big.' Mrs Tosh's face wore a grim look, but she said nothing. However, the huge pot never again made its appearance.

The chums kept changing until they found 'diggings' and a landlady to suit them. Mrs Macpherson was a Highland widow in reduced circumstances, whose heart warmed towards her Highland lodgers. An occasional Gaelic phrase exchanged between them acted like a charm, and served as a talisman against imposition. For Mrs Macpherson was not proof against making a little out of mere Sassenachs, but her soul rose in revolt against the bare idea of 'doing' a fellow-Celt. She took a motherly interest in the lads. She darned their socks, sewed on their buttons, and evinced a touching solicitude for their comfort in all respects.

When the summer vacation arrived, where should the youths spend their holidays but in their beloved Herrington? They travelled by the delightful West Coast route. The *Claymore* called at many quaint townships snugly nestling in quiet bays, with the giant hills towering majestically above them. Ah! those glorious Highland hills! Who with a spark of the Divine in his soul can help feeling impressed by their grandeur? The littlenesses of human nature shrink abashed before them. They reveal the secret of the Highlander's insight, his spirituality, his romance, his poetry. How could a people living under the shadow of such majesty, daily learning from these Books of Nature, be sordid, or mean, or commonplace? But the spell is broken by the realisation that a grinding poverty has, by a gradual process, been crushing the finer feelings out of these hill-dwellers; and increasing contact with the cold materialism of the world is doing the rest.

The steamer was full of southern tourists, many of whom had never been farther north than Rothesay, and they affected a fine contempt for everything and every one Highland. In their view, civilisation came to a dead stop at Oban, and beyond lay a region of semi-barbarism and partially-clothed barbarians. In their sublime ignorance they looked down on Highlanders from their lofty standpoint with a condescension which, if they had only known it, was ludicrously misapplied. Two of these superior individuals, dressed

in loud checks, were speculating as to what kind of place Herrington, and what manner of people the Herringtonians, might be. Their mental horizon was bounded by the four walls of a warehouse in Buchanan Street or Cheapside, and they applied everything Highland—the hills included—to the commercial touchstone.

'It wouldn't take much to buy up this place,' they would say, contemplating one of the small townships; 'sixpence three-farthings a mile, or a hundred pounds for the whole bag of tricks, and dear at the money too.'

'Let's take a rise out of these cads,' whispered Johnny Matheson to his friend, as the steamer was crossing the Minch, and forthwith they proceeded to draw a terrible picture of their native place and its inhabitants. 'Desperate characters—unsafe to venture out at night without a revolver—a deadly enmity towards everything in trousers, especially if the trousers are of a loud pattern.' Such were a few of the pleasant fictions with which they entertained the tourists, who began to feel an uncomfortable sensation, which they attributed to the vicious waves of the Minch, as these made the *Claymore* feel lively. It may, however, have been what is generally termed 'funk.' Anyhow, it is on record that the loud-checked ones returned from Herrington unscathed, but sadder and distinctly wiser men.

David and Jonathan, by which names the two medicals became known, had 'a real good time' in Herrington. They were general favourites, and every house was open to them. Fishing, sailing, and shooting galore were the order of the day. But a cloud was about to settle on the horizon of their enjoyment.

One day, when trout fishing, Davie seemed strangely preoccupied. He cast wildly and never got as much as a rise. His companion, too, made a poor show.

'Hang it all, Davie,' he said, 'I'm not a bit of use to-day; and as for you, you'll never get a rise if you continue to cast in that fashion.'

'Johnny,' was the solemn reply, 'I am going to tell you something. Don't you think Mary Campbell is a fine girl?'

Johnny started. 'You're right there, my boy. But—but what has that got to do with what you were going to tell me?' And he laughed nervously.

'Well, it's just this. I'm clean head over ears in love with her, and you're the only one that knows it. Now she's very friendly with you (Johnny winced), and I want you to—to put in a good word for me when you get the chance. You'll do that for me, won't you?'

Johnny Matheson was silent for a moment, and then he replied very slowly:

'I'll do anything I can for you, David (he had never called him 'David' before); I promise you that.' And the two shook hands.

'You're looking very pale, Johnny,' said Davie

Forbes as they trudged homewards with their empty baskets over their shoulders.

Mary Campbell was indeed 'a fine girl' as Davie Forbes had said. She was straight and lissome, and two bonny blue eyes looked now mischievously, now demurely, over a straight nose, a well-shaped mouth, and cheeks like rowans. She had been the cause of many sighs and heart-aches, for she was provokingly impartial in her favours. 'Miss Crissie's' old housekeeper, Jessie—that shrewd observer of human nature—had on more than one occasion given her views about Miss Mary Campbell.

'She's as purty a lassie as ever walked,' she would say. 'But she's chust like the rest of them. They know how the lads run after a purty face, and they don't make themselves too cheap. But it's a good heart Miss Mary has got, as well as a bonny face, and it's me that's thinking there's a soft spot in it for some one. Oh no—it's me that's not going to say his name. But I'll be knowing it all the same.'

Some weeks after the confession of Davie Forbes to his friend, they were out together at an evening party—the last before their return to Edinburgh.

'Parties' are a mild form of excitement in Herrington which are extremely popular among those by whom dancing is tabooed. As a rule they are characterised by decorous, depressing dullness, occasionally relieved by flashes of merriment. Cards are not permissible, but a harmless substitute is found in 'word-making' and similarly intellectual exercises. And really good singing is to be heard at these parties, for the air of Herrington appears to affect beneficially the elasticity of the vocal cords. Davie Forbes was easily first at the game of 'word-making,' and elicited an approving smile at his triumph from Mary Campbell, who was looking her best in a new dress specially made for the occasion. The other girls looked dowdy beside her; they saw with envious eyes that she was as easily first in the game of heart-breaking as was Davie Forbes in the art of 'word-making.' Curiously enough, 'Jonathan' proved a regular duffer at the latter exercise; but a careful observer could see that he overdid the cudgelling of a normally fertile brain, and that he seemed desirous of acting as a foil to the brilliancy of his friend. Both, too, were known to be possessors of fine baritone voices; but whereas 'David' sang with fine effect and thrilling expression the old ballad 'Mary' ('Kind, kind, and gentle is she'), 'Jonathan' gave a very lugubrious rendering of 'Thou art gone from my gaze, like a beautiful dream.' A hardly perceptible tremor was in his voice as he concluded.

'You're not in very good voice to-night, Mr Matheson (it used to be 'Johnny' when they were boy and girl); perhaps you are affected by the thought of leaving Herrington again so soon.' And Mary Campbell laughed nervously.

'I dare say that's it, Miss Campbell (it used to be 'Mary'). The fact is, Davie and I have had such a good time in the old town that neither of us likes the idea of going back to work. A holiday makes one so dreadfully lazy although it is supposed to have the opposite effect.'

'I suppose you will think and talk of us in this remote corner when you are together in your "diggings." Isn't that the correct name?'

'We shall often think and talk of you'—with a quite unnecessary emphasis on the last word—he answered gravely.

'I have never known such close friends as you two. I should imagine now, either of you would be capable of making a great sacrifice for the other, if required?' She looked at him demurely.

'Perhaps—— But there is that pompous old ass, Fearsome, going to treat us to a bad quarter of an hour from "Israel in Egypt." He thinks it is "classical" to sing oratorio music, and he is very proud of his runs.'

But he was secretly pleased at the interruption.

When the party broke up, the pairing of the younger people was the signal for feats of diplomacy which an ambassador might have envied.

'We go the same way, don't we, Mr Matheson?' and a pair of blue eyes shot fire into 'Jonathan's' heart, as he replied lamely:

'It is my misfortune to—to have to go the other way to-night, Miss Campbell. But,' he added eagerly, 'my friend Davie goes your way.'

'Friend Davie' was not far away, and anxiously offered his escort, which was accepted without enthusiasm. But here the voice of the hostess intervened with a request for 'Mr Forbes to see Miss Skimp home, and perhaps Mr Matheson wouldn't mind escorting Miss Campbell.' Miss Skimp was a spinster of fifty summers, who gushed her thanks and forthwith confided her angular frame into the safe keeping of the disgusted Davie. And so Johnny Matheson had to see Mary Campbell home after all. That young lady determined to have her revenge on her apparently unwilling escort.

'I can assure you, Mr Matheson,' she said in her most freezing tones as they trudged along the deserted and moonlit street, 'it pains me beyond expression to take you out of your way on my account. I fully appreciate the sacrifice.'

'For Heaven's sake, Ma—Miss Campbell, don't—please don't.' He pulled himself up with an effort.

'I fancy,' she continued mercilessly, 'I fancy that the escort whom you had so kindly provided for me would have found my company a little less burdensome.'

'I am quite sure he would,' he replied eagerly. 'I mean—I mean—he is a far more worthy escort than I. Miss Campbell,' he went on, 'if you only knew what a fine fellow Davie is, how clever he is, how good-hearted he is—you would—you would—well, you would admire him immensely.'

'And who told you, pray, that I don't admire him?'

He looked at her—the blue eyes were laughing mischievously.

'Yes—yes—but you would admire him tremendously. In fact, if you really knew him as I know him, you couldn't help loving him.'

'Indeed—no doubt. But I am not aware that I want to know him so well as to admire him tremendously, and as for loving him—well—but it is really too funny.' And she laughed outright.

'Why do you laugh?'

'An idea struck me. Have you ever been tickled by an idea?'

'No, my ideas never tickle, they bite.'

'Then, pray don't have any until you have seen me safely home. You might have an attack of hydrophobia, or should it be ideaphobia?' The merry laugh chilled him.

'Are you fond of poetry, Mr Matheson?' she asked as they were parting.

'No, not particularly. But why do you ask?'

'Because I want to make you a present of a Longfellow. He is delightfully simple, so I like him. I dislike equally men and books that are enigmas. But I must now bid you good-night with my best thanks for your act of self-sacrifice.' As the door closed he caught a glint of her eyes brimming with laughter.

It was not until they were back under Mrs Macpherson's homely roof in Edinburgh that he opened her parcel and looked at the copy of Longfellow which she had sent him. He found a book-marker inside. The place which it marked was 'The Courtship of Miles Standish.'

That was all. But it was enough. The joy which filled his heart struggled with pity for his friend. 'Poor Davie' was all he said—'poor Davie.'

The story had to be told. It was a bitter pill for Davie, but he bore it manfully. 'You've won her fairly, Johnny,' he said as he wrung his friend's hand. 'Everything that a friend could do you have done. But you were meant for one another. You're a lucky fellow in winning such a girl, and I am a lucky fellow in possessing such a friend.'

They heard from Herrington that Mr Fearsome of oratorio fame was pressing his suit most persistently on Mary Campbell. He was rich, but Johnny Matheson was now assured that riches and a love of Handel combined could make no impression on the heart he had won in spite of himself.

'I have a good mind,' said Mary Campbell to him when at last they met again—'I have a good mind to make you learn "Miles Standish" off by heart as a punishment for being such a bashful lover. Only I knew all the time how matters stood—leave that to a woman's insight—and it made me love you all the more. As for me,' she

added demurely, 'I have been reading Goldsmith lately. "She Stoops to Conquer" has a peculiar fascination for me. But beware of ever attempting to presume on that, sir.'

Johnny's reply need not, for the purposes of this story, be recorded.

As for the two friends, they are likely to remain David and Jonathan to the end of the chapter.

THE POET.

Who is the Poet? Who?—How dare define

The mystic art divine—

The matchless power that flings

A touch of magic o'er Life's meanest things—

The subtle Syren who so sweetly sings

To sailors on Life's main

That soul and sense alike surrender to the strain?

Not he, with noble aims and ideals born,

Who meanly dares to scorn

High thoughts and themes sublime;

Who feeds the vulgar ear with vulgar rhyme,

Fitting the fashion of the fickle time;

And Poesy's fair flower

Would make subservient to Ambition's pride of power.

Not he consumed with sensual passion's fire,

Though on his wanton lyre

A willing world hath hung,

What time with blistered lips of love he sung,

Dropping the cadence of his cancerous tongue;

His heart a hell contains,

And where a God should rule a grinning Satyr reigns.

Not these! The Poet sojourns not with such!

His sympathetic touch

Loves human smiles and tears;

He feels Creation's pulse—Earth's hopes and fears,

And all that Life endangers, Life endears,

Are his; on spirit-wings

Uplifted, he discerns the Infinite in things!

Yet, with his best endeavours, still his best

Is ever unexpressed;

He never can impart

Half the bright jewels from his brain that start;

The highest art must still conceal its art,

Or just a hint suggest

That intimates the whole, or half-implies the rest.

The moon's soft arc its silver circle tells;

Within the ovum dwells

The Laureate-Lark enshrined;

In the hard flint the prisoned fire you find;

The self-same Hand the blushing rose designed

As moves this mighty world;

And all the planet laws are in each dewdrop pearled.

All the imperial sheen of purple dyes

In the low murex lies;

The best eludes our ken,

The sweetest thoughts escape the Poet's pen.

Even in the hour of seeming triumph, when

The air with praise is rent,

He softly sighs and feels a noble discontent.

J. HUDSON.